

VIR March Madness saw records broken and broken again – Paul Kaiser wins both days, but not without a battle from John George and Jim Schenck. Paul, Jim and John all broke the Scott McKay track record in the race on Saturday – John setting the best time of 2:11.950 – more to come on that adventure. And not to be out-done, Paul broke it in the Sunday race by a scant .003 seconds for a 2:11.947 – more on that too.

Eight FFChallenge series drivers made it to VIR for some great competition and fun. New competition license holders Marty Howard and Ray Pascarella joined the fun, & Peter LaRose came back to the fold after a year off. Tom Lavell and Carl Thompson rounded out the lineup.

The last time most of us were at VIR it was a scorching 108 degrees, this time it made it to a numbing 46 with overnight temperature close to freezing. Even though the temperatures were cold the competition was HOT and the lap times showed it.

The Friday test and tune went well for most of the gang, but Ray was suffering with overheating problems and eventually replaced the water pump to see if he could fix it – that didn't do it and he unfortunately packed it up on race day and towed it home. John George ran well during most of the session and then the "electrical gremlin" jumped under his dash and wrecked havoc with his new wiring harness. On session 4 the fuse blows to the computer, killing the car instantly. He finally gets a combination of ECU/sensors to work and is ready for Saturday – OH, if he only knew! In Saturday's practice and qualifying, the gremlins reappear and John misses both and will be gridded last in our 7 car FFR start.

Thanks to Brian Sanders getting the folks in his Region to put all the FFR series cars together for the start, we get the Mid-Atlantic leaders to do the same for us. So at grid time, Paul is on the pole with Jim to his left. Thompson is behind Paul in the 3rd position with Tom Lavell to his left in 4. Marty Howard is the 5th position and Peter LaRose is to his left in 6th, and John is in 7th – Ray didn't start.

On the start it is the usual dash to the first corner. John hit the "after burner" button and came flying through the pack reminiscent of Scott McKay's start at Miller MotorSport Park in September. "Remind me, if you would, to check for that After Burner Button on John's car". Tom got by Carl into 3rd place and, at the top of the fast esses, John got by too. So, heading into the "Oak Tree" it was Paul, Jim, Tom, John, Carl, Marty, and Peter. I catch a good draft behind John who gets by Tom and then I get past John. Wow, back in 3rd. But John expresses it best – "Carl and I have a good battle until Carl decides he can break really late for turn 1 and promptly goes off the track leaving me with a clear path to go catch up to Jim and Paul." I guess trying to brake at marker # 3 is a little too aggressive. John is chasing to catch up to Jim and Paul, I'm trying to catch Tom, and Marty and Peter are chasing me. John tracks down Jim and they swap positions a couple of times. As they approach the checker John get a good draft – BUT, it is Jim by a couple of feet. I almost catch Tom at the checker – but it doesn't happen. So, in the process John turns the blistering record setting lap finishing 3rd, Jim is 2nd, and Paul 1st. Tom holds onto 4th, Carl 5th, Marty 6th and Peter 7th. The video links below will show all this in detail.

The evening food and trophy session is fun and everyone is “out of there” about 8pm to catch some rest. The only worry is that the impending inclement weather prediction has us all thinking “rain tires” to address the 80% chance of rain on Sunday.

Sure enough, it rains over night and is raining in the morning when it is time for qualifying. Only 3 people go out. Paul, John, and Carl – Jim doesn’t have rain tires and the rest of the gang says “why bother”? By race time the course is clearing and it has stopped raining. So, Jim is back in the game with his “drys” and we are on for the 40 minute race. The line up is Paul on pole with John on the outside. I once again get in 3rd, Marty 4th Jim 5th and then Tom. Peter hurt his knee and didn’t race. From John perspective – “At the drop of the flag Paul and I start what will be an epic race swapping positions just about every lap. I was able to get in front of Paul early and was building a nice gap to him until traffic messed up my plans. Paul was flying trying to catch me, eventually got back on my bumper starting the back and forth battle. 2 laps to go Paul gets a great run onto the front straight and is able to force me to the outside of turn one, both of us going full speed and breaking at the last possible second. Well, I broke a little too late locking up the front wheels and went off the track.. as I get back on the racing surface, there goes Jim flying by with not enough laps left to catch him I finished 3rd”. Turns out that Jim and Carl swap positions back a forth a number of time until Jim is able to put away and chase down Paul and John – quite a race. So, after all the action, Paul finished 1st breaking John’s Saturday lap record by .003 seconds, Jim is 2nd, John 3rd, Carl 4th, Marty 5th and Tom 6th. It was an exciting start for the season and we look forward to continuing on to the next race at New Jersey MotorSport Park in mid April.

Here are the videos courtesy of John George and his computer talents:

Videos:

Quadscreen of Saturday's race from Jim, Paul, me, and Carl. <http://vimeo.com/21732841>

Jim Schenck Incar FFR#52 Saturday: <http://www.vimeo.com/21637953>

JG Incar FFR#48 Saturday: <http://www.vimeo.com/21626655> <- almost 2nd!

Carl Thompson Incar FFR#1 Saturday: <http://www.vimeo.com/21677591>

Splitscreen of Sunday's race from my incar and Paul's. <http://www.vimeo.com/21730232>

Paul Kaiser Incar from FFR#8 Sunday: <http://www.vimeo.com/21677382> <- the epic battle!

JG Incar FFR#48 Sunday: <http://www.vimeo.com/21625268> <- the epic battle!

Jim Schenck Incar from FFR#52 Sunday: <http://www.vimeo.com/21672994>

By Carl Thompson and John George